



Original Article

Me Too': A Myth of the Feminist Nation or A Reality of the Post-National Feminism?

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Abstract

The discourses of both nationalism and feminism have evolved into newer forms over the last few decades. Scholars are divided on the question of the final determinant of national identity; some of them believe commonality to be the ultimate force behind the formation of national consciousness whereas others hold difference responsible for the birth of national identity. One can take recourse to Anthony D. Smith's theory of nationalism in order to have a balanced view of national identity. Smith in his definition of nationalism emphasises the elements which "range from (presumed) ethnic ties to a shared public culture, common historical memories and links to a homeland". This 'homeland' has become the most problematic as well as contested issue in the age of 'fluid nationalism'. In the post-globalised world, 'homeland' does no more refer to a geographically defined locale, instead it is well-accepted as a psychological space which is ever-stretchable. Thus the possibility of an Andersonian 'nation' based on "common historical memories" of exploitation and the resultant trauma suffered by the 'fair sex' cannot be simply ruled out. Can such a nation be safely called a 'feminist nation'? This question has become extremely relevant in the context of the #Me Too movement which has taken the world by storm in recent times. Global feminism is no more a strange concept and in many ways bears close resemblance to post-national feminism but post-national feminism's uniqueness lies in its approach to the question of both nationalism and female identity. The stated movement has opened the floodgate of possibilities of reinterpreting the discourses of both nationalism and feminism in the age of post-globalisation.

Keywords: Nationalism, Feminism, Identity, Plurality, Trauma, Resistance.

Introduction

Nationalism and feminism have historically shared an uneasy relationship. Nationalist movements have frequently mobilised women as symbols of cultural authenticity, collective honour, biological reproduction, and national continuity, while feminist movements have questioned the very structures through which gendered citizenship and belonging are produced. Feminist scholarship has therefore demonstrated that the nation is not a gender-neutral formation. Women participate in the reproduction of national communities biologically, culturally, symbolically, and politically, yet their access to citizenship, authority, and representation has often remained unequal (Yuval-Davis, 1997). Consequently, the relationship between feminism and nationalism cannot be understood merely as either opposition or cooperation. It involves simultaneous processes of belonging, exclusion, identification, and resistance. The transformations associated with globalisation and digital communication have made this relationship more complex. The circulation of people, capital, narratives, images, and political claims across borders has weakened the assumption that collective identity must necessarily correspond to a clearly demarcated territorial space. Ong's (1999) discussion of transnationality, for instance, demonstrates how mobility and global networks complicate conventional relations among territory, citizenship, identity, and state authority. At the same time, globalisation has not abolished nations or nation-states. National law, citizenship, language, race, caste, religion, and economic inequality continue to determine the material conditions within which individuals participate in supposedly global communities. It is within this tension between territorial persistence and transnational mobility that the #MeToo movement acquires theoretical significance. Although Tarana Burke began the "me too." movement in 2006 as survivor-centred work concerned particularly with marginalised women and girls, the phrase acquired extraordinary global visibility as a social-media hashtag in 2017 (me too. International, n.d.).

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Its subsequent circulation across countries and cultural contexts transformed personal testimony into a mode of collective identification. Mendes et al. (2018) describe such digital feminist activism as capable of consciousness-raising and solidarity while also recognising the risks, emotional costs, and exclusions associated with online participation. #MeToo therefore raises a question larger than its immediate politics of sexual harassment and violence. Can a community linked through memories of gendered vulnerability, testimony, trauma, and resistance constitute something analogous to a nation? If nationalism depends partly upon shared memories, public narratives, imagined belonging, and collective identification, could feminism similarly produce an imagined community that exceeds territorial boundaries? Or does calling such a community a “feminist nation” reproduce precisely the homogenisation that contemporary feminist theory has struggled to overcome? This article argues that #MeToo can be interpreted as an imagined feminist community, but only metaphorically and with substantial qualifications. It exhibits some nation-like features: collective memory, affective belonging, symbolic vocabulary, narratives of injury, and a shared language of resistance. Yet it lacks the territorial, juridical, institutional, and relatively bounded character generally associated with nationhood. More importantly, women do not constitute a homogeneous political community. Race, caste, class, sexuality, nationality, religion, disability, language, and access to technology fundamentally influence both experiences of violence and access to public recognition (Crenshaw, 1989; Nanditha, 2022). The argument developed here is therefore that the “feminist nation” is more useful as a critical metaphor than as a sociological reality. #MeToo is more convincingly understood as an expression of post-national feminism: a networked and mobile feminist politics in which solidarity can be produced across national borders without erasing differences among participants. “Post-national,” in this article, does not mean the disappearance of nations. Rather, it refers to feminist political identification that is no longer contained by the territorial nation as its primary frame of belonging.

Research Questions

The article addresses the following questions:

1. To what extent can concepts of nation and imagined community be applied to the collective identity produced through #MeToo?
2. Can common experiences and memories of gendered violence create a non-territorial “feminist nation”?
3. How does #MeToo reflect the characteristics of post-national or transnational feminism?
4. How do race, caste, class, nationality, sexuality, language, and digital inequality challenge the assumption of a universal feminist community?
5. Is #MeToo better understood as evidence of a feminist nation or as a contingent post-national feminist formation?

Objectives of the Study

The principal objective of this study is to examine #MeToo at the intersection of theories of nationalism, feminism, transnationalism, and digital activism. More specifically, the study seeks to reinterpret the concepts of homeland, collective memory, belonging, and imagined community in relation to contemporary feminist mobilisation; to distinguish global or universalist feminism from post-national and transnational feminist approaches; to analyse the possibilities and limitations of #MeToo as a model of cross-border feminist solidarity; and to examine the internal inequalities that prevent the movement from becoming a homogeneous feminist collectivity.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive, and theoretical methodology. It does not attempt a quantitative measurement of #MeToo posts or an empirical survey of individual participants. Instead, it undertakes a critical reading of scholarship on nationalism, feminist theory, transnational feminism, intersectionality, and digital feminist activism. The theoretical framework combines Anderson's concept of the imagined community, Smith's ethno-symbolic account of national identity, feminist critiques of nationalism developed by Yuval-Davis, intersectional analysis associated with Crenshaw, and transnational feminist approaches represented particularly by Mohanty and later scholarship. Studies of digital feminism and #MeToo, including the work of Mendes et al. (2018), Fileborn and Loney-Howes (2019), Phipps (2020), Dey and Mendes (2022), and Nanditha (2022), provide the basis for evaluating the actual possibilities and exclusions of networked feminist solidarity. The study uses conceptual comparison and critical discourse analysis to investigate how categories such as “nation,” “homeland,” “memory,” “identity,” “trauma,” “solidarity,” and “resistance” change when transferred from territorially based nationalism to digitally mediated feminist politics. The term “post-national feminism” is employed operationally rather than as a claim that nation-states have become irrelevant.

Review of Literature

The theoretical starting point for conceptualising nationhood remains the recognition that nations are not reducible to administrative boundaries. Smith (1991) defines the nation through interconnected elements including historic territory, shared myths and memories, mass public culture, common rights and duties, and economic relationships. His approach is valuable because it refuses to reduce national identity either to pure political construction or primordial ethnicity. Collective memories, symbols, and perceptions of historical continuity matter. Anderson (2006), by contrast, famously conceptualises the nation as an “imagined political community.” The importance of the term “imagined” lies not in suggesting falsity but in recognising that members of even relatively small nations cannot personally know all other members. Community is therefore sustained through representation, communication, shared narratives, and simultaneous consciousness. This approach becomes particularly suggestive in relation to digital communities in which individuals who will never encounter each other nevertheless recognise themselves as participants in the same struggle. Feminist scholarship complicates both models. Yuval-Davis (1997) demonstrates that national projects are constructed through gendered divisions of citizenship, cultural reproduction, and symbolic representation. Women often become bearers of national identity while remaining politically subordinated within the nation. Her later discussion of

intersectionality further emphasises that gender cannot be treated independently of class, race, ethnicity, and other social divisions (Yuval-Davis, 2006). Transnational feminism develops this critique further. Mohanty (2003) challenges universalising constructions of “Third World women” and argues for solidarity that acknowledges historically specific relations of power. Feminist solidarity across borders cannot be founded upon an assumption that all women experience patriarchy identically. Transnational feminist theory instead examines how gender interacts with colonial histories, capitalism, migration, race, nation, sexuality, and global inequalities (Zerbe Enns et al., 2021). Such arguments are especially important when analysing digital feminism. Mendes et al. (2018) identify #MeToo as a powerful form of digitally mediated consciousness-raising. Public testimony can transform experiences previously understood as isolated or private into evidence of structural inequality. Nevertheless, digital visibility is uneven. Access to platforms does not automatically guarantee equal attention, credibility, safety, or influence. Fileborn and Loney-Howes (2019) likewise show that #MeToo revitalised conversations about sexual violence while also creating important questions concerning who can speak, whose testimonies become visible, what constitutes justice, and which populations remain marginal. Phipps (2020) develops a sharper critique of mainstream feminism by showing how privileged forms of feminist visibility can reproduce racialised and political inequalities. Banet-Weiser (2018), similarly, situates contemporary popular feminism within media cultures in which feminist visibility exists alongside equally visible misogyny. Research on India further demonstrates that the global circulation of #MeToo does not produce identical feminist politics everywhere. Nanditha (2022)

Argues that Indian digital feminist movements must be examined through inclusivity and intersectionality, particularly because caste and class influence the distribution of visibility and voice. Bansode (2020) draws attention specifically to the relative absence of Dalit women from prominent #MeToo testimonies. Dey and Mendes (2022), studying #MeToo and Indian higher education, similarly demonstrate that digital feminist activism is shaped by institutional hierarchies and local structures of power. The literature therefore leads to an important theoretical conclusion: #MeToo is simultaneously global and situated. It circulates transnationally, but every articulation occurs within unequal social structures. This paradox forms the foundation of the present study.

From Territorial Homeland to Affective and Digital Space

The concept of homeland traditionally assumes a geographically identifiable territory to which collective memory and belonging are attached. Yet contemporary communication has allowed communities to form around shared experiences rather than shared residence. Digital networks produce spaces of association where geographical distance does not prevent collective recognition. #MeToo exemplifies such a space. The expression “me too” performs two functions simultaneously. “Me” announces an individual experience; “too” immediately places that experience within a collectivity. The phrase moves from singularity to plurality in only two words. Testimony becomes both autobiographical and communal. The survivor does not merely state, “this happened to me”; the addition of “too” implies that the experience belongs to a pattern shared with others. This linguistic structure makes #MeToo particularly significant for an Andersonian analysis. Participants do not know the overwhelming majority of other participants, yet they can imagine themselves as part of a collectivity connected through recognisable experiences and political demands. Their community is sustained through circulation rather than territorial proximity.

If a conventional nation imagines a homeland geographically, #MeToo appears to construct what may be called an affective homeland. Its space consists of narratives, recognition, memory, empathy, anger, and resistance. Such a homeland has no permanent boundaries. It expands whenever another testimony enters the discursive community. Yet the analogy cannot be taken literally. A social-media network is not sovereign territory. It possesses no independent legal system, institutional citizenship, or stable mechanism for determining membership. Its boundaries are permeable, algorithmically mediated, and commercially owned. The imagined feminist homeland consequently remains dependent upon corporate digital infrastructures and upon the national jurisdictions within which individual participants live. The digital space is therefore simultaneously liberating and constrained. It enables solidarity beyond borders but cannot abolish the political importance of borders.

Trauma, Memory, and the Imagination of a Feminist Community

National consciousness is frequently constructed through selected historical memories. Wars, displacement, colonisation, victory, defeat, sacrifice, and collective suffering may become components of national narratives. The question raised by #MeToo is whether memories of gendered violence can similarly produce collective identification. Feminist consciousness-raising has long transformed apparently private experiences into political knowledge. Sexual harassment, domestic violence, workplace discrimination, and assault cease to appear as unrelated individual misfortunes when comparable experiences are narrated collectively. #MeToo intensifies this process through digital circulation. The repetition of testimony produces an archive of gendered experience. The resulting community, however, is not based on identical trauma. It emerges from recognition across difference. This distinction is fundamental. To claim that all women share the same experience of violence would erase the historically specific forms through which patriarchy intersects with race, caste, class, colonialism, religion, sexuality, and economic dependence. Crenshaw’s (1989) intersectional critique makes precisely this universalisation impossible. A viable feminist collective must therefore be organised around relational rather than identical experience. Its commonality lies not in a single female condition but in the recognition that gendered forms of power operate differently across social locations. For this reason, the feminist nation imagined through #MeToo differs from classical nationalist narratives. Nationalism frequently seeks unity by emphasising sameness and suppressing internal difference. Post-national feminist solidarity, by contrast, must make difference constitutive of solidarity itself. Its challenge is not to proclaim, “we are all the same,” but to establish the political possibility of saying, “our experiences differ, but the structures producing our vulnerabilities are connected.”

The “Feminist Nation”: Possibility and Myth

The idea of a feminist nation is theoretically attractive because #MeToo displays several characteristics associated with imagined communities. It possesses a recognisable symbolic vocabulary, collective narratives, memories of suffering, heroes and representative figures, common adversaries in patriarchal structures, and rituals of public identification through testimony and hashtag participation. Its members can experience attachment to strangers and may recognise attacks on unknown survivors as assaults upon a larger collectivity. In this limited sense, #MeToo performs a nation-like function. It creates horizontal recognition among geographically dispersed individuals and enables personal experiences to acquire collective significance. Nevertheless, describing it as an actual nation produces serious problems. First, there is no singular feminist subject. The category “woman” is internally differentiated, and feminism itself contains profound disagreements regarding political priorities, sexuality, labour, race, religion, nationalism, law, punishment, and strategies of resistance. Second, visibility within #MeToo has never been equally distributed. The voices most capable of entering public discourse frequently possess forms of cultural, linguistic, technological, or occupational capital unavailable to more marginalised survivors. This problem is particularly visible when comparing elite workplace scandals with the experiences of domestic workers, agricultural labourers, informal-sector workers, migrants, Dalit women, Indigenous women, and economically disadvantaged communities. Third, the concept of “nation” ordinarily suggests boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. Feminism cannot reproduce national logic uncritically without generating its own outsiders. A feminist nation defined through a universalised female experience could exclude trans persons, queer subjects, lower-caste women, racial minorities, migrants, disabled women, and others whose experiences complicate dominant narratives. Phipps's (2020) critique of mainstream feminism is useful here. The language of universal feminist solidarity can conceal the ways privileged groups speak as though their own experiences represent the whole. Nanditha's (2022) analysis of #MeToo India similarly demonstrates why digital feminism must be assessed intersectionally.

Thus, if the term “feminist nation” implies a homogeneous people united through a singular identity, it is a myth. If it is used more modestly to identify the affective and imaginative functions performed by collective feminist narratives, it remains a productive metaphor.

MeToo and the Reality of Post-national Feminism

The limitations of the nation metaphor lead to the second concept in the title: post-national feminism. Post-national feminism may be understood as a politics of feminist belonging that crosses national boundaries without assuming the disappearance of national structures. It differs from a simplistic notion of “global sisterhood.” Global sisterhood can imply that women possess a naturally shared identity irrespective of history or material location. Transnational and postcolonial feminist thinkers have repeatedly challenged this assumption (Mohanty, 2003). Post-national feminism instead begins from mobility and plurality. Solidarity must be constructed rather than presumed. It emerges through translation, negotiation, recognition, and political coalition. #MeToo embodies this process. The circulation of its language allows people in different societies to recognise related structures of gendered violence. Yet the movement is translated differently according to local conditions. The institutions against which testimony is directed, the legal meanings of harassment, the risks of public accusation, the economic consequences of speaking, and the cultural vocabulary available to survivors differ substantially across societies. Post-national feminism is therefore not placeless. Paradoxically, it becomes post-national precisely by connecting multiple places without collapsing them into one. Its political geography is a network rather than a single territory. The difference can be expressed schematically. A nationalist model tends to move from territory toward solidarity: individuals belong together because they are understood as members of a nation associated with a homeland. #MeToo moves in the opposite direction. It begins with dispersed experiences and creates provisional spaces of solidarity through communication. Its “homeland,” if the metaphor is retained, is produced after identification rather than existing before it. This makes #MeToo a particularly important example of twenty-first-century feminist politics.

India, Caste, and the Limits of Universalisation

The Indian experience is especially significant for testing the post-national thesis because it reveals both the mobility of #MeToo and the limits of assuming that an imported digital form retains an identical political meaning. The movement acquired considerable visibility within Indian media, entertainment, journalism, academia, and professional sectors. Yet Indian feminist politics cannot be understood through gender alone. Caste, class, religion, region, language, institutional position, and access to digital media shape both vulnerability and the possibility of public testimony. Nanditha (2022) demonstrates that #MeToo India raises significant questions of exclusion and intersectionality. Bansode (2020) specifically identifies the marginal visibility of Dalit women within prominent #MeToo narratives. Such critiques do not invalidate #MeToo. Rather, they demonstrate why post-national feminism must remain self-critical. Dey and Mendes (2022) show that the Indian higher-education context became an important site in which digital testimony challenged established power relationships. Yet universities themselves are stratified institutions. The ability to name misconduct publicly may vary according to caste location, academic status, employment security, language, institutional reputation, and access to supportive networks. India therefore illustrates a central feature of post-national feminism: global feminist vocabularies acquire political force only through local translation. A hashtag can travel easily across borders; vulnerability cannot. Neither can institutional protection, economic security, or access to justice. This distinction prevents romanticisation of digital feminism. The transnational circulation of testimony expands feminist possibility, but it does not automatically redistribute social power.

Digital Publics, Counterpublics, and Unequal Citizenship

#MeToo may consequently be described more accurately as a feminist public or counterpublic than as a nation. It creates an arena in which experiences historically excluded from dominant public discourse become visible and collectively interpretable. Testimony performs a form of epistemic resistance. Sexual harassment often depends upon isolation: each individual may believe

that an experience is exceptional, private, unverifiable, or somehow caused by personal failure. Repeated testimony alters the epistemic structure of such experiences. What appeared exceptional becomes patterned; what appeared private becomes structural. This transformation explains why #MeToo cannot be dismissed as “merely” online activism. Digital speech can change the conditions under which social problems become intelligible. Mendes et al. (2018) identify precisely this potential for feminist consciousness-raising. Nevertheless, participation in the feminist digital public resembles unequal citizenship. Some participants possess enormous audiences, institutional credibility, financial security, and media access. Others risk employment, litigation, social ostracism, online abuse, or physical harm simply by speaking. Banet-Weiser’s (2018) analysis of popular feminism and popular misogyny is important here because visibility does not necessarily produce liberation. Increased feminist visibility may coexist with intensified misogynistic reaction. Digital platforms can host solidarity and harassment simultaneously. The post-national feminist public must therefore be analysed in terms not merely of access but of power. The fact that anyone can theoretically speak does not mean everyone can speak under equal conditions, nor that every testimony receives equivalent recognition.

Findings and Discussion

The theoretical analysis produces five principal findings.

1. #MeToo possesses nation-like imaginative characteristics

The first finding is that #MeToo performs several cultural functions conventionally associated with nation-building. It creates a symbolic vocabulary, shared narratives, collective memories, emotional identification, and a sense of belonging among strangers. Anderson’s (2006) concept of imagined community therefore provides a valuable framework for understanding how dispersed survivors and supporters can perceive themselves as participants in a common struggle.

2. The feminist nation is metaphorical rather than institutional

The second finding is that #MeToo cannot convincingly be described as a nation in a strict political or sociological sense. It lacks bounded territory, sovereignty, common citizenship, unified political institutions, and a stable system of membership. Smith’s (1991) account of national identity consequently reveals both the strengths and limitations of the analogy. Shared memories and public culture may exist, but the territorial and juridical components of nationhood do not.

3. Trauma alone cannot constitute feminist unity

The third finding is that shared vulnerability to gendered violence cannot be converted into an assumption of identical female experience. Intersectionality makes such universalisation theoretically untenable. Gendered violence is mediated by race, caste, class, sexuality, nationality, disability, occupation, religion, and other social divisions (Crenshaw, 1989; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Feminist solidarity must therefore be based on differentiated commonality rather than presumed sameness.

4. #MeToo represents a significant form of post-national feminist politics

The fourth finding is that #MeToo provides substantial evidence for post-national feminist mobilisation. Its narratives travel across borders, produce affiliations among geographically separated individuals, and challenge the assumption that feminist political belonging must be nationally contained. Yet this post-nationalism is neither anti-national nor beyond the nation-state in an absolute sense. National laws, institutions, languages, and social hierarchies continue to shape participation.

5. Plurality is not a weakness but a condition of post-national feminism

The fifth and most important finding is that plurality must be treated as constitutive of feminist solidarity. A sustainable post-national feminism cannot depend upon the erasure of difference. The critiques arising from women of colour, Dalit feminists, queer politics, postcolonial feminism, and other marginalised positions reveal the incompleteness of dominant feminist narratives, but they do not necessarily destroy feminist solidarity. They make a more ethical form of solidarity possible.

The #MeToo movement should therefore be understood as an unfinished political formation. Its importance lies not in having created a unified global feminist identity but in having demonstrated the possibility of connecting dispersed experiences while simultaneously exposing the inequalities within that connection.

Conclusion

The question posed in the title cannot be resolved through a simple choice between myth and reality. #MeToo contains elements of both. The “feminist nation” is a myth if the expression is intended to describe women as a homogeneous people sharing a unified identity, common political territory, or universal experience of oppression. Neither feminist theory nor the empirical diversity visible within #MeToo supports such an interpretation. The category of woman is traversed by caste, class, race, sexuality, religion, nationality, language, and numerous other social locations. Any feminist politics that converts one group’s experience into a universal female experience risks reproducing exclusion within the movement itself. Nevertheless, the feminist nation is not an entirely meaningless idea. As a metaphor, it reveals how collective memory, affect, testimony, symbolism, and imagination can create attachments among strangers. #MeToo has shown that experiences once isolated within private memory can become part of a transnational archive of gendered violence. In this respect, an Andersonian reading remains productive. The community is imagined, but imagination is not equivalent to illusion. Imagined communities can produce real political consequences. The more persuasive interpretation, however, is that #MeToo represents an emergent form of post-national feminism. Its political space exceeds the territorial nation without rendering the nation irrelevant. Its participants can recognise common structures of gendered power while remaining situated within distinct histories and unequal social locations. Its solidarity is networked rather than territorial, relational rather than homogeneous, and provisional rather than sovereign. The transformation of “homeland” is crucial to this argument. Within #MeToo, homeland can no longer be imagined simply as land. It becomes a communicative and affective space generated through recognition. Yet this space is not universally accessible. Digital

inequality, cultural authority, class privilege, caste hierarchy, race, language, and institutional power determine whose narratives circulate most widely. For that reason, the future significance of post-national feminism depends less upon expanding the number of voices claiming a universal identity than upon creating conditions under which differences can speak to one another without being hierarchically arranged. The political promise of #MeToo lies not in creating one feminist nation but in making possible solidarities that do not require a single nation, a single homeland, or a single model of womanhood.

Thus, #MeToo can be called a “feminist nation” only metaphorically. Its deeper historical importance lies in demonstrating the reality, possibilities, and contradictions of post-national feminist politics in a world where identities, memories, and resistance increasingly cross borders, even while power remains unevenly distributed within and between them.

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